

# How experts want journalists handle legal, ethical issues in Investigative Journalism

The Daily Trust, in collaboration with the Centre for Media Law and Development, Daily Trust Foundation and MacArthur Foundation organised a 2-day conference on “Legal and Ethical Issues in Investigative Reporting in Nigeria” discussing many interesting matters of the media.

By **Abbas Jimoh & Clement A. Oloyede**

Whenever top guns in the media and other stakeholders converge on matters on the industry, it is always brainstorming sessions. It was no different at the two-day editorial conference in Abuja put together by Daily Trust in conjunction with Centre for Media Law and Development, Daily Trust Foundation and MacArthur Foundation.

While welcoming participants across newsrooms of print and broadcast outfits, Chairman, Daily Trust Foundation, Malam Wada Maida, reiterated the foundation's commitment to enhancing competency in journalism in the country. He said the foundation has trained over 200 journalists in Nigeria in the art of investigative journalism and is working towards training more.

“Journalists are meant to scrutinize the activities of those in power and ensure that those who operate contrary to the legal framework and policies setting up the agencies of government they oversee are exposed and made to account for their misdeeds,” he said.

On his part, the Director (Africa), of the MacArthur Foundation, Dr. Kole Shettima, has stressed the need for media houses to broaden their financial autonomy to guarantee editorial and professional independence.

Shettima who is also a Chairman of the Governing Board of the Centre for



Some speakers at the conference are from left Mr. Charles Udoh, Commissioner of Information, Akwa Ibom State, a former Borno State Attorney-General and Senior Partner in the J. K. Gadzama & Associate, Barrister Muhammed Monguno, Air Commodore Anas Yusuf (rtd), Executive Secretary, Centre for Crisis Communication and acting Chairman, Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON), Mr. Godfrey Ohuabunwa. Photo: Abdul Musa

Democracy and Development (CDD), said the MacArthur Foundation was delighted to work with media organisations in Nigeria on critical issues of investigative journalism as the organisation sees it as a core part of its mandate.

“To further deepen investigative journalism in Nigeria, MacArthur Foundation was also sponsoring investigative journalism training in about eight other Nigerian languages, especially as most Nigerians cannot communicate in English. This would also help promote Nigeria's indigenous languages,” he explained.

Also, the Editor-in-Chief/Chief Executive Officer of Media Trust

Limited, publishers of Daily Trust titles, Mallam Mannir Dan-Ali, expressed concern why the media continue to focus on the well to do instead of promoting the plight of the downtrodden, who needed to be reported for the government to act on their plights.

“Why is it that we are mostly concerned about reporting the Senate President, the Speaker and the governors? Why are we forgetting that our role of comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comforted. But you see us mostly afflicting the afflicted and comforting the comforted. What this means is that we are doing the bidding of those in powers and not asking the

question on their responsibilities and how they are imparting on the society, this is supposed to be our job,” Dan-Ali said.

Renowned lawyer and human rights activist, Femi Falana (SAN), while presenting the Lead Paper of the roundtable urged journalists to be careful in their dealings so that they can be able to carry out their jobs professionally.

He also urged them to note the risk involved in investigative journalism but that there were landmark judgments that protect them from being victimized by those in authority.

On his part the Director General, Centre for Media Law and Development, Mr. Charles Odenigbo, said the event was to deepen investigative journalism in the country.

Also, the Acting Chairman, Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON), Mr. Godfrey Ohuabunwa, insisted that investigative journalism had become critical, especially with the proliferation of the social media and citizen journalism.

According to him, “It is unfair that journalists, reporters will be harassed for saying the truth. The media is the only avenue through which the common can express his views. It is important that we go beyond getting news but doing investigation...”

Also, the Director General, Voice of Nigeria (VON), Mr. Osita Okechukwu, said that the Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) emerged as a major legislation in the country since

the advent of democracy and presented a veritable tool for media organisations to hold people in authority to accountability.

A former Borno State Attorney-General and Senior Partner in the J. K. Gadzama & Associate, Barrister Muhammed Monguno, the Chief Executive of Premium Times, Mr. Dapo Olorunyomi, a former Director General, Nigeria Law School and Vice Chancellor of the Baze University, Prof. Tahir Mammen and Managing Partner and CEO of The Eugenia Abu Media, Eugenia Abu among others also spoke at the event.

Also, the Programme Coordinator of the event, Dr. Theophilus Abbah said it is dangerous to write an investigative story by depending on “word of mouth” alone and that apart from it being very dangerous, even if not denied, “It could prove that you're too simplistic.”

However, the communiqué of the conference noted and resolved that investigative journalism is critical to nation building but comes with grave responsibilities. It stated that while there is need for a knowledge gap in that sector of journalism and hence the need for journalists to be educated in the various laws and legislations that affects journalism practice.

Part of the communiqué read: “That investigative journalist should know the story before embarking on gathering evidence. That evidence must be corroborated from different sources that are relevant to the fact in issue. And the motives of evidence providers must be thoroughly vetted and verified.

“That it is within the ambits of law for investigative journalists to behave like detectives but they must understand that the scope of investigation and the rights of citizens been investigated are usually governed by legal framework that must be respected. That investigative journalism must be based on high degree of public trust/public interest,” it said.